

*Canada*

*Address on*

THE PROBLEMS OF  
WESTERN CANADA

by

The Hon. James G. Gardiner, B.A., LL.D.

Premier of The Province of Saskatchewan

before the

EMPIRE CLUB OF TORONTO



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The Hon. James G. Gardiner, B.A., LL.D.

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MR. CHAIRMAN AND GENTLEMEN:

About seven or eight years ago while I was previously Premier of Saskatchewan I was asked to speak to your Club on the problems of Western Canada as they concerned all Canada. I did so and enjoyed your hospitality. I appreciate very much the fact that on a number of occasions since I have been asked to return and speak. On this occasion I was asked to again speak on Western Problems.

The worries of to-day are different to the worries of 1926-27. As I remember the burden of my story at that time we were worried about the number of nationalities we had invited into the West. Our land flowing with golden wheat was considered a fit heritage for a chosen people and we questioned the right of others to come. I think we resolved together that the elements from which the British peoples had been constituted were liberally represented in Western Canada. We determined that the thrift and industry of the German, the dashing bravery and chivalry of the French, the love for adventure of the Norse were also characteristics necessary to produce a race that could endure the hardships of pioneering and stand as a bulwark to British Constitutional government.

None of us dreamed at that time the hardships would be so great or the Constitution so tried as has been the case. All are convinced that none could have endured the hardships with greater fortitude and perseverance. I hope all can agree that none could have been more loyal to British constituted authority and British traditions than those of the great central western provinces. That worry has passed from us I hope for ever.

#### *Our New Worry*

Since 1930 the land which was previously considered fit for a chosen race has been dry. The dust has been blowing; prices have fallen. Men and women and children have been hungry. Our new worry is as to whether we ever should have settled the land with the people of any race.

If I can reassure you by answering that question which is in the minds of many of you I shall consider that the time has been well spent.

#### *Three Steps*

The country west from the Red River Valley to the foothills of the Rockies is composed of three steps. The edge of each takes the form as you approach it from the east of a range of hills each of which parallels the Rocky Mountains. The Red River step averages 800 feet above sea level. The second step is 1,600 feet above sea level and forms a park-land area, Brandon and Regina are near the two edges of this step. The third is 3,200 feet above sea level and extends from Moose

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Jaw to beyond Calgary. This third step has upon it almost all of the short grass prairie lands to-day known as the drought area.

### *The Climate*

Of the country south of Saskatoon and Battleford it is generally correct to say that the farther west you go the drier it gets. It is also generally correct to state that the more moisture the more virile the vegetation. Elms and Oaks grow in the Red River Valley and along other streams on the first step. The second is clothed with Poplar and Willows. The third has no tree life excepting under exceptional conditions which I will describe.

### *Why?*

You ask me why and I will try to tell you in the words of the physical geography taught in the schools of our province. We are living in the north temperate zone. The turning of the earth on its axis and the unequal heating of the earth's surface causes the prevailing winds in the north temperate zone to be westerly. These winds in moving across the warm currents of the Pacific Ocean, lick up moisture. When they come in contact with the Rocky Mountains, they drive upward into higher altitudes and lose their moisture on the western slopes of the Rockies, producing enormous trees, but come down the eastern slopes to lower altitudes, depleted of moisture. These prevailing westerly winds blow the greater part of the time, hence the climate is dry.

When we do get easterly winds they are driven upward by the hills marking the different steps until when they reach the third step they are also comparatively dry. I give you this description to indicate that if we are going to do anything to change the general climate on this third step we must either level down the Rocky Mountains or cause the earth to turn the opposite way on its axis. I am afraid that even Governments would fail in that.

### *Do We Want to Change the Climate?*

To answer the question as to whether we want to change the climate materially I will give you a very simple illustration. The longest growing season in Saskatchewan is at Maple Creek. Thirty-five miles south are the Cypress Hills, a few hundred feet high. When warm winds from the south strike these hills and are driven upward sufficient moisture falls upon the hills to produce trees 15 inches through although there are no trees for a hundred miles around. But the greater precipitation lowers the temperature and shortens the season. The crop season on the Cypress Hills is no longer than at Prince Albert, 250 miles further north.

If we had the rainfall which you have in Ontario on the third or prairie step, grain growing would probably be impossible. We would certainly not be able to grow the hard protein wheat which is sought by millers throughout the world for their mix.

We are constantly working between two difficult possibilities Drought and Rust or Frost. Experience has shown that we get the necessary amount of moisture more often than we are compelled to do without.

### *What Has Experience on the Prairie Shown ?*

1. In those sections of country settled before 1890 there was drought from 1890 to 1895.

2. In 1907 the crop was frozen.

3. 1914 was the driest year we ever had.

4. 1917 to 1921 was as dry in certain areas as the present period.

To recall the drought of the 90's is to recall the good crop years between 1900 and 1914.

To recall 1914, the worst year in our history, is to recall 1915 and 1916, the best years in the history of the southwest.

To recall the years from 1917 to 1921 is to recall the years from 1922 to 1928, the years of bumper crops and good prices.

That is why we are a "next-year" country. That is why we are optimistic throughout the west.

### *Saskatchewan*

To illustrate more clearly let me come to our province, Saskatchewan. If we take a square sheet of paper and fold it corner ways dividing the province from a little north of the American border on the east to where the North Saskatchewan River enters the province we will have a division showing the Semi-Arid and Park lands of Saskatchewan, the first south of the line and the latter north of the line. That line forms roughly the eastern edge of the third or prairie step.

The area north of the line was settled before 1906. With that part alone settled we produced 35,000,000 bushels of wheat. From 1908 to 1914 the southwest or prairie section was settled. In 1928 we produced 321,000,000 bushels of wheat in Saskatchewan, two-thirds of which was produced in the area which we now call the drought area.

That part of the province north of the line has 900,000 cattle, 400,000 hogs, and produced 100,000,000 bushels of wheat in a good crop year.

That part south of the line has 600,000 cattle, 200,000 hogs and produced 200,000,000 bushels of wheat in a good crop year.

Wheat is the wealth-producing plant nearest in its requirements to prairie grass of anything which we can grow. It was the increase in wheat production in Saskatchewan in the drought area between 1908 and 1928 which placed Canada among the four great wheat exporting countries of the world. It was the drought area which gave to Canada the name, "Bread Basket of the Empire".

All that is required to stop the dust blowing and produce the wheat again is rain. The Lord will take care of that in His own good time. We have some problems of our own growing out of our experiences.

### *Problems of Production*

Living in a semi-arid country we must eliminate those lands from production which are too light to conserve moisture. Lands with natural drainage in the form of gravel and sand must be eliminated from agriculture and turned back to grass. If not the blowing of the sands from them in dry seasons will completely destroy thousands of acres round about by covering them with sand.

We have not been short-sighted in that matter. After the operations of the Wheat Board during the war the moneys obtained from overages were turned back to the province. We received this money while I was Premier in 1926. We set it aside as a fund to be used under the guidance of a Commission by the agricultural staff of the University to make a soil survey. The results of that soil survey are now mapped and we can show you exactly the nature of the soil in every part of settled Saskatchewan. There are only very limited areas which must be got out of grain growing. We have already passed legislation to make that possible.

### *Tree Growing*

If you were to drive through Southern Saskatchewan to-day and see the number of groves which were beauty spots five years ago and are now dead through drought you would understand the tribulations and disappointments of tree growers in that area. It would cost more to grow and keep growing enough trees in that country to affect drifting than it costs to keep the people through from one dry period to another.

### *Building of Dams*

Every Government we have ever had in Western Canada from 1882 to the present has been building dams. Dams are dotted over the whole country. Individuals have also provided themselves with dams or dug-outs. But we are not foolish enough to think they change the climate.

We know that some of the spots where it rains the least are over the ocean. We know that some of the greatest natural deserts in the world, such as in German West Africa and Southern California, are bounded on the west by oceans. We know that something has got to drive air upward before you get rain. We know that you would have to build an ocean before the dry winds of Western Canada would lick up enough moisture to make them moist. We know that we would have to build a range of mountains to get the moisture out of the winds again.

We build dams to water stock, not to change the climate.

The Lord has a much more simple way of doing that than we. He sends an occasional moisture-laden breeze skirting up the east side of the

Rockies from the Gulf of Mexico and another from the north pole. They meet. When they meet the north wind shoots the light warm winds heaven-ward and its moisture falls in rain.

For the last five years these winds have been losing their moisture further north. The lakes in Isle le Crosse and Cumberland are five feet higher than usual. We think we are going to get the calms of rising air currents with falling rains this year. We think so because we have had calms and snow all winter.

We are going to still build dams but leave the climate to the Lord.

### *Going to Dry-Farm*

We are going to dry-farm still. In other words, we are going to conserve moisture through certain forms of tillage one year to help us through the next.

### *Going to Do More*

We have been doing all these things and must do more. We must learn again the lessons taught by Joseph in Egypt. I heard a very good definition of a certain type of economist not very long ago. A gentleman said that type of economist is one who has only read one book. He ought to make it the Bible.

We have had the plague of wind, the plague of tree lice, the plague of cut worms, the plague of locusts and the plague of opinions, and we have suffered for almost seven years. I am coming more and more to the view that Joseph's cure is the only one. We must store up seed and feed in the fat years. We are arranging to do it. We must make profit in the good times and save. You cannot spend people into prosperity. We ought to declare war on high pressure fly-by-night salesmen of every type. If it weren't for the constitution we could do that by law.

### *International Trade*

In 1926-7-8 the value of Saskatchewan farm products was \$1,180,000,000. In 1931-2-3, the value was \$354,000,000. Our three best years produced more than three times as much wealth as our three worst.

In 1928 the production from grain alone was valued at \$338,000,000. In 1931, the value was \$67,000,000. Poor crops reduced production to one-third but poor prices reduced values to one-fifth.

It will be evident from these facts that it is not sufficient to produce crops. We must sell them at reasonable prices. England eats the greater part of our wheat, but good prices will only prevail when European countries are taking considerable quantities of our wheat.

If I believed with certain advocates of policy that we could never again enter the European market, I would say, close up the hard wheat

areas of semi-arid Saskatchewan at once and save further loss. But I am convinced from reading history and studying human nature that Frenchmen, Germans and Italians will not continue to eat bread made from \$1.80 wheat home grown in preference to eating \$1.25 wheat grown in Canada one moment longer than their national safety demands it. Even when national safety is secured through a treaty based upon balance of power, France, Germany, Italy and Britain will only trade with those who trade with them.

If we are going to hold that market for Canadian trade, the place for our wheat is on the tables of Europe as a substantial part of the millers' mix, and not in storage elevators in Canada.

With Europe buying our wheat in reasonable quantities, and at reasonable prices, there is no better place to build a home and rear healthy children than in the semi-arid regions of the west.

### *People Must be Kept There*

The immediate problem is that of keeping the people there. Scottish caution, French vivacity, German thrift, British trade and industry were products of environment and necessity. The Saskatchewan characteristics will be bred of our experiences through alternating periods of good and bad crops. We can only develop these characteristics through time.

We are struggling through the first generation and are receiving government assistance. In the end we will pay our debt to Canada one hundred per cent. through causing the wheels of industry and transportation to move, with that effectiveness which gives employment to men.

### *In the Meantime, What?*

With the Lord looking after the climate, the government maintaining people of experience where they are, the people applying their farming and economic experiences to the climatic, soil and financial positions, and the co-operation of those in older civilizations who have investments to make because they too have stored up from the past, we shall pull through.

Our total indebtedness, individual, municipal, provincial and that part of the federal which we ought to pay will not exceed \$600,000,000. Our crop for three good years brought \$1,180,000,000. In the last three years it only brought \$354,000,000. That leaves over \$800,000,000 of difference. Don't you see that if we were content to live through three years of good crops and good prices as we have been compelled to live through three years of bad, we could pay all our debts with the savings and have \$200,000,000 over with which to take care of conveniences now denied because people are on relief. In short, those people could live four times as well as they are living to-day, and pay all their debts with rain falling in sufficient quantities and trade flowing freely.